

Progress Report

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Natural Resources Conservation Service

Los Lunas, New Mexico

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BOTTLEBRUSH SQUIRRELTAIL - NEW RELEASE IN DEVELOPMENT FROM THE LLPMC

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Plant Description

The Los Lunas Plant Materials Center (LLPMC) is in final release procedures for Bottlebrush Squirrextail (*Elymus elymoides*). Bottlebrush Squirrextail is a cool-season, perennial bunchgrass that has a very high potential for use as a conservation and range improvement plant. It is bright green in color and bristly-headed with awns up to 10 cm in length. This plant is an invader-type species, and it is sometimes called bristlegrass, bushtail, or foxtail. It is most commonly found in dry gravelly soils or in saline soils, but it also can be found in other types of soils. Its range of adaptation is wide-spread; from as far north as British Columbia and the Dakotas to Missouri, Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, California and Mexico.

The palatability of Bottlebrush Squirrextail varies according to its locality and the season of the year. Generally for spring and early summer, it is fair-to-good cattle forage and fair sheep forage. Once seed heads form, the palatability is reduced due to the presence of awns on the seed. Forage in the fall can be good if adequate moisture is present and the seed heads have dropped from the plants.

Bottlebrush Squirrextail is an excellent species to use in reclamation sites that are in poor condition. It establishes easily, and it can create an environment for progressive introduction of a climax community. It can be a good forage value plant on range sites by providing early and late season grazing for livestock.

Background

In 1983, 130 Bottlebrush Squirrextail collections were made from various locations in New Mexico and neighboring states. In 1984 these collections (accessions) were established in an initial evaluation planting at the LLPMC. The planting was evaluated for traits that were desirable for a plant materials

variety release. In 1994, the PMC selected eight accessions from this planting and used them in a composite increase.

Accession

1. 9044301
2. 9035488
3. 9035529
4. 9035463
5. 9035406
6. 9048703
7. 9035461
8. 9035410

Location

Tres Piedras
Ghost Ranch
Taos
Apache Creek
Silver City
Ojo Caliente
Reserve
Glenwood

In 1999, the LLPMC harvested and planted seed from this planting into a final increase field. The seed produced from this field will be used for further testing of the selection, and once released, it will be provided to commercial growers.

If you have questions concerning Bottlebrush Squirrextail or any species the LLPMC is currently working on, please contact us at 505-865-4684.

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